

## GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

7th/8th November 1981

The 22nd annual autumn census of Greylag Anser anser and Pink-footed Geese A.brachyrhynchus was held over the weekend of 7th/8th November 1981. Both species had indifferent breeding seasons and while the number of Greylags has risen slightly since last year to 96,000, the Pinkfoot total is down some 5000 to 90,000.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each region and district of Scotland, and each county of England, are set out in the table below, together with the figures for November 1979 and 1980. The individual totals have been rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1000. Where identifiable, feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags have been omitted.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	11 Nov 1979	9 Nov 1980	8 Nov 1981	11 Nov 1979	9 Nov 1980	8 Nov 1981
Orkney	40	310	160	-	-	-
Highland						
Caithness	3250	4090	4300	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	20	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	13230	15380	27400	-	-	-
Inverness	2080	4170	5300	-	-	-
Nairn	480	110	10	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	650	970	-	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	1370	760	1580	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	5000	4000	4750	1400	2200	5900
Gordon	2620	5670	6440	5850	4350	7300
Kincardine & Deeside	4000	2500	3980	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	7950	8400	2950	8000	7320	3400
Perth & Kinross	24230	23070	15030	11710	33010	15530
Central						
Stirling	1140	1300	1080	3000	2430	2500
Fife	20	700	2250	5500	4000	6150
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	1420	1000	2790	-	-	-
Cunningham	-	250	150	-	-	-
Renfrew	270	-	140	-	-	-
Dumbarton	2000	2000	250	-	50	-
Strathkelvin	20	10	40	-	-	-
Lanark	-	1470	-	1600	830	940
Kyle & Carrick	310	400	460	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Midlothian	580	730	2370	8500	5350	8730
East Lothian	80	30	840	3200	11930	4510
Borders						
Tweeddale	-	-	10	10420	7230	12340
Berwickshire	1280	1600	820	3220	3670	1000
Roxburgh	3400	6690	3950	20	-	440

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	11 Nov 1979	9 Nov 1980	8 Nov 1981	11 Nov 1979	9 Nov 1980	8 Nov 1981
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	830	1400	2190	-	-	160
Stewartry	600	910	740	-	-	-
Nithsdale	90	70	310	130	3380	2210
Northumberland	3100	1430	4130	-	20	-
Cumbria	920	1600	1300	30	70	20
Lancashire	-	-	-	16610	9200	18240
Humberside	-	-	-	400	320	-
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	800	50	530
BRITISH TOTAL	81000	90000	96000	80000	95000	90000

#### Weather and general conditions

The main problem with the weather was fog which persisted in some parts of central and eastern Scotland. Elsewhere conditions were good with only light winds and little precipitation. The fog may have led to a little undercounting at a few sites, though in one important area later ground counts during the daytime showed that few if any had been missed at the earlier flight.

After a run of poor harvests, Scottish farmers were able to make an early and clean harvest of the barley this year. There was almost no spilt grain on the stubbles in most areas and birds were moving on to potato fields and grass much earlier than usual.

#### GREYLAGS

The population now stands at yet another new record total though the increase over last year is a modest one in line with the rather poor breeding season. Indeed in a sample of over 2000 birds the breeding success, measured by the percentage of young birds, was 13.9%, or rather below the long-term average. The mean brood size was 2.0.

The regional distribution shown in the table opposite reveals how the absence of spilt grain affected the birds. In fact there was one small area in Ross and Cromarty where a farmer failed to harvest his barley and very large numbers of Greylags fed there for many weeks. There were just over 20,000 there at the time of the census, but within two weeks numbers were up to around 40,000. As this is greater than the number in the Highland region during the census one has to conclude that birds moved back north to take advantage of the available grain. The proportion of the geese in East Central Scotland was the lowest for many years while numbers in all three regions to the south were generally up.

#### PINKFEET

The population has fallen back from its record level last year, yielding once again, as in 1978, the position as Britain's most numerous goose to the Greylag. Breeding success was slightly better than for the Greylag, but still below average with 15.7% young birds in a sample of over 4000, taken from most parts of the range. The mean brood size was very low at 1.9.

In view of the shortage of spilt grain in Scotland it was no surprise to find very large numbers reaching Lancashire early in the autumn, largely it would seem at the expense of East Central Scotland. There were no Pinkfeet taking advantage of the windfall of grain in Ross and Cromarty, but numbers in Grampian were well up.

## Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1979-1981

Figures are percentages of total populations

	1979	1980	1981	1979	1980	1981
North Scotland	40.5	42.2	56.2	9.0	6.9	14.7
East Central Scotland	41.1	37.1	22.3	35.1	49.0	30.7
South-east Scotland	6.6	10.0	7.5	33.5	29.5	30.0
South-west Scotland	6.8	7.3	8.4	0.2	4.5	3.7
North England	5.0	3.4	5.6	20.7	9.7	20.3
East England	-	-	-	1.5	0.4	0.6

### Future censuses

It is fully intended that this long and valuable series of November censuses will continue in the future. However it is also hoped that some additional counts can be attempted at other times of the winter. One of the main stimuli for additional counts stems from the passing of the new Wildlife and Countryside Act with its provisions for the issuing of licences to shoot grey geese outside the normal shooting season. This will be done to prevent damage to growing crops in the spring and our knowledge of goose numbers and distribution at that time is much less good than it is for the autumn months.

Spring counts are already carried out in a few areas but there has not been an attempt at a national census in the spring since the mid-1960s. At that time it was discovered that the geese, and especially the Greylags, are far more scattered than they are in autumn, and also prone to use temporary and irregular roosts, for example on floodwater. The national totals were not particularly satisfactory, but at least most of the major, and therefore potentially damaging, concentrations were located. I am hopeful that we can achieve at least the same success again, and possibly rather better.

I would like to carry out a spring census of both the Greylags and the Pinkfeet over the weekend 20th/21st March this year and look forward to receiving the same willing help that you have given me over the many years of November censuses. I will be writing again, with the usual notification of place and date, during February.

### Acknowledgements

I am as always grateful to a large number of people who took part in this census and I may mention in particular Allan and Lyndsey Brown and Ray Murray who took over the organisation of the counts in the Lothians and Borders, no easy task. This change came about following the sad death of Mr William Brotherston who had run the counts in that area since their inception, and contributed much to our knowledge of the geese. I would like to thank all the following for their help and any others whose names are inadvertently omitted.

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J.M.Gunn, Mr and Mrs A.Henry, R.Hesketh, W.G.Hughes, Dr J.Kear,  
P.K.Kinnear, J.Kirk, H.Kruuk, R.Lambert, S.Laybourne, M.Leven,  
Mr and Mrs J.Lister, T.Lumsden, C.McCarty, W.J.McCulloch, A.Macdonald,  
D.Macdonald, Mrs M.K.Macduff-Duncan, Mrs I.McKinnie, D.MacLeman,  
J.McNish, M.W.A.Martin, R.P.Mason, E.Maughan, F.Mawby, D.W.Muins,  
D.Mower, R.Murray, Mr and Mrs C.G.Nendick, I.Nicol, D.A.O'Connor,  
J.M.A.Osborne, M.Nugent, N.Picozzi, R.E.M.Pilcher, B.Pounder,  
P.Reynolds, Dr R.Richter, M.J.Richardson, W.Russell, G.L.Sandeman,  
B.Sears, A.Shepherd, E.M.Smith, Mr and Mrs Shimeld, Dr P.H.Smith,  
R.W.J.Smith, R.T.Smith, A.G.Stewart, Miss L.Stewart, Mrs M.Stiell,  
Miss V.M.Thom, I.D.L.Thomson, D.Thorogood, F.Symonds, J.Turner,  
Dr L.L.J.Vick, J.H.Wallace, R.Walls, S.Wanless, A.D.Watson, J.D.Wilkins,  
K.Woodbridge, A.A.Wright, G.Wright, Mrs P.J.Wright, M.Wright,  
R.Zawadski, B.Zonfrillo.

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M.A.Ogilvie,  
Wildfowl Trust,  
Slimbridge,  
Gloucester,  
GL2 7BT.